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ABSTRACT

Teachers need to become active participants in the political processes that have an impact on the quality of schooling. In order to be effective agents in the public forum, teacher candidates need to acquire the knowledge and skills that are derived from a solid grounding in the foundations of education. The areas of study commonly associated with the foundations would enlarge the frames of reference of prospective teachers, thereby enabling them to think and communicate much more analytically about schools and schooling. (JD)

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Views of

'EDUCATING EDUCATORS'

Presented

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'EDUCATING EDUCATORS' [1]

A Brief Critique

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Introduction: The video tape by John Goodlad and his associates which you have just seen entails a good deal of material pertinent to teacher education on just about every campus. From my vantage point there were positive as well as less positive aspects to the tape. What struck me most pointedly and positively was related to three categories of teacher preparation, (1) the need to have informed, knowledgeable teachers, teachers who thoroughly and sensitively understand their discipline(s), (2) the need to identify exceptional elementary and secondary schools which should be related closely to colleges/universities, and (3) the need to recognize our role as professional educators responsible for assuming a larger voice in the public sphere about how we can improve the learning which goes on when teaching takes place.

On the less positive side the tape (1) most distressingly, lacks any organizing frames, models or theories which could be used as guideposts to direct and/or categorize the conversations and ideas which it generates; (2) stresses the need, as have many of the post- Risk reform efforts , to involve a significant array of societal groups, e.g. governors, legislators, chief state school officers, college presidents, lay persons, and others, most of whom (a) have not the foggiest notion about the challenges related to the preparation of teachers, and (b) have acquired whatever insights they possess from observation of teachers during the twelve or more years they themselves have been students in schools, and (3) again, most distressingly, omits almost entirely the need for prospective teachers to acquire knowledges, skills and dispositions which

are most likely to be derived from the foundations of education.

Positive Points: Just a few words about each of these matters. First of all the positive points. There can be no tenable argument whatever which would make the claim that prospective teachers, particularly in the secondary grades (here defined as 7-12) do not require a deep understanding of the discipline or disciplines which they will teach. If semester hours of credit are used as one criterion of measurement, this means that a prospective teacher ought to have no fewer than twenty-four and more often between thirty and thirty-six hours of credit. As Shulman points out, "The disciplines are not only the grounds for practice, they are a big chunk of what the practice is about." [2] In the lower grades, with the broad array of instructional responsibilities teachers face, two disciplines, each with 18-24 semester hours of credit would be more desireable, with the possible exception of those subjects such as music, art, physical education and, perhaps, mathematics; ordinarily the former three are handled by specialists in the lower grades; the latter could become a necessity if we are really interested in having our students acquire the mathematical competency which our state and national rhetoric emphasizes.

John Goodlad,writing in the Phi Delta Kappan, makes the telling point that "There is growing agreement among researchers and critics that student-teaching placements are often casually made. Many student teachers," he argues, " observe neither the best in teaching nor an adequate array of alternative practices..."[3] Elsewhere in the same piece he cites "Recent studies which suggest that undesirable and ineffective practices in our schools persist not in isolated instances, but generally."[4] "Is it not reasonable," he continues, "to believe, then, that the mentoring of a neophyte by an experienced teacher, without any accompanying sustained reflection guided by a third party with authorized opinions on pedagogy and other matters, migh merely perpetuate the status quo."[5] We have for too long in our state avoided the need to come to grips with the problem of identifying and employing only the very best schools and the very finest teachers as locations where the culminating experience of a prospective teachers undergraduate experience, student teaching, is permitted to take place. We need to establish statewide criteria which can be invoked to determine whether a school or a teacher is qualified to engage in the supervision of student teachers, or of interns if they are in place. The same need exists relative to the identification of persons

qualified to engage in the mentoring process.

If there is any claim about the relationship between our public schools and the larger culture that is beyond refute it is that they are the product of vigorous political action from the state right down to the local political unit. What shall be taught, who shall be required to learn this material, and how it shall be paid for constitute significant curricular and financial issues which affect all of our citizens. Within the classroom, decisions by teachers determine in a lasting and significant manner the the nature of human consciousness which students will acquire. Their views of the world will be set, often times with much resiliency, for years to come. Given this political world in which education policy-making and practice are embedded, it behooves all of us to become active participants in the political process, particularly, but not solely, as it affects our public schools. Who is more better qualified to speak to the larger public about the ills and possibilities of our public schools. For too long many of us have seen our tasks as stopping at the classroom or school door, permitting others in the community to control the nature of schooling which actually takes place. We must rise up, individually and collectively, to point out ways in which our schools can be improved. In this regard I believe every teacher has potentially worthwhile narratives to tell. Perhaps unions, associations, or simply groups of teachers, could encourage one another at least on an annual basis to write about some aspect of their experience so that it may be shared with others. Teachers possess an enormous wealth of experience which, if regularly tapped, would surely be of great benefit to their supporting communities, to other teachers, and to the long-term improvement of teaching and learning that goes on in our schools. As stewards over the continued improvement of our schools, teachers have a moral responsibility to engage in this sort of professional activity.

Less Positive Points: On the less noteworthy side, I was distressed to find no identification of theoretical frameworks, paradigms or models which could have been used to guide the conversations which the tape evokes. What we observe is an assortment of disjointed ideas, mostly unrelated, though in a few instances this is not the case, which make it difficult for one to emerge from viewing the tape with a coherent picture of what is significant. It is not that there are no organizational structures which could have been employed to facilitate the discussion which took place, only that they were not apparent anywhere in the tape.

One need look no further than the excellent piece by Schulman in the Third Edition of the Handbook of Research on Teaching, entitled "Paragigms and research programs in the study of teaching: A contemporary perspective," to discover a rich array of designs "that include concern for a wide range of determinants influencing teaching practice and its consequences."[6]

Many of the major reports on how to improve the teaching and learning which takes place in our public schools has involved a large number of people from many different walks of life. Clearly, by implication, they have argued that the public schools belong to the people and the people ought to have a significant role in deciding how they will be operated and what it is they ought to be doing. The trouble with this is that the only knowledge about teaching and learning which many of these people have acquired through the years has been derived from their own experiences in schools as students themselves. Consequently they have little to fall back on but their limited personal experience. While, at the same time, in their midst, there will be one or two persons who have spent a lifetime thinking about and considering ways in which schooling and teaching can be improved. Egalitarianism runs rampant however, with each person assumed to possess the same degree of expertise in these circumstances. What other profession would make an effort to improve its services in this way? Certainly none of the respected ones.

Finally, and most importantly to me, perhaps because I am deeply involved in the field of foundations, the tape does very little to stress the need for students to acquire understandings from that important form of knowledge, referred to by Broudy as 'tacit' knowledge, or 'knowledge with ...' which constitutes the basis upon which analytical thought can take place during the activity of teaching. Shulman gets at the need for this form of knowing a bit when he stresses the need to be clearly aware of what the students are prepared to learn; and Goodlad in his closing remarks pointed out that just a very small percentage of students in teacher preparation could talk about their respsonsibilities as teachers in a democratic society, or about problems created by the pursuit of excellence and equity in our public schools. These are topics which, while by no stretch of the imagination all, constitute several important dimensions of the the foundations. As a whole, though, the tape sadly neglected those realms of study which we associate with the foundations which would enlarge the frames of reference of our prospective teachers, thereby enabling them to think and communicate much more analytically

about our public schools. Our public schools will be in peril to the extent that the knowledges and skills to be derived from study in the foundations of education are denied our prospective teachers.

Summary: My intent in this brief paper has been to provide a few reactions to the video tape prepared by John Goodlad and his associates, and to promote conversation about matters related to the problem of 'Educating Educators.'

Reading Notes

1. Educating Educators is a video tape which was produced by Encyclopedia Britannica for The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and the Education Commission of the States. The main speaker in the tape is John Goodlad.

2. Shulman, Lee S. (November, 1987). "Learning to teach." In: AAHE Bulletin. Washington, D.C.: American Association for Higher Education. Reprinted in: Edmundson, Phyllis J. (1989). Educating educators-A guidebook for promoting conversations about change. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and Denver, Colorado: Education Commission of the States.

3. Goodlad, John I. (1988, October 8). "Studying the education of educators: Values-driven inquiry." In: Phi Delta Kappan. 110.

4. Ibid., 107.

5. Ibid.

6. Shulman, Lee S. (1986). "Paradigms and research programs in the study of teaching: A contemporary perspective." In: Wittrock, Merlin C. (ed.). Handbook of research on teaching-Third edition. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company. 4.